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Sheldon Jackson

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SHELDON JACKSON

A Pioneer in the New West

Condensed from an article by General John Eaton in the Review of Reviews

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A PIONEER IN THE NEW WEST

DR. SHELDON JACKSON has been so identified for the last eighteen years in efforts to educate and save the native population of Alaska, that his previous twenty years' service in promoting education and the establishment of churches among the Rocky Mountains, and thereabouts, has almost passed out of mind.

Indeed this generation has need of no little effort to apprehend the forces, and their operation, which have united since the completion of the first line of transcontinental railway to develop the region bounded by California and Oregon on the west, and on the east by the States bordering on the Mississippi—an empire in itself. How vast the two fields with which Dr. Jackson's efforts have been connected!—this interior region stretching from Canada to old Mexico and embracing perhaps a fifth of the territory of the United States, and Alaska containing 580,107 square miles! The greatest distance between churches established by him in the first

region is not less than 2,000 miles, and the greatest distance between schools in the second is not less than 2,500 miles. Ten days before the golden spike was driven, May 10, 1869, telling the country and the world of the completion of railroad connection between our Atlantic and Pacific coasts, Dr. Jackson was appointed superintendent of missions for Iowa, Nebraska, Dakota (North and South), Wyoming, Montana and Utah by the Presbytery of Council Bluffs, then in session at Sioux City. There was no money in the treasury and none was promised him. Soon after the presbyteries of Des Moines and Ft. Dodge took similar action.

Born in Minaville, New York, in 1834, graduated at Union College in 1855 and at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1858; ordained in May of the same year by the Albany Presbytery, he with his wife, of like spirit and consecration, entered the service of the Presbyterian Foreign Mission Board. His health was not considered adequate for service in Asia or Africa, and they were assigned to the Indian Territory near Texas. There the malaria proved too much for his health, and he entered the service of the Home Board in the colder climate of Southern Minnesota and Western Wisconsin, and his headquarters were at La Crescent from 1859 to 1864. During the fall of 1863, in the service of the Christian Com-

mission, he served in the hospitals of Southern Tennessee and Northern Alabama. Five more years of enlarged work in Southern Minnesota, with headquarters at Rochester, Minn., brought him to the Herculean task to which the above action of the Iowa Presbyteries called him.

The East was so little awake to the emergency that the organized action of the church would have repressed the effort, but he felt the call to be one of duty, and did not hesitate. The ten days before the golden spike was driven had not passed before he had selected three missionaries, Revs. Hutchinson, Gage and Hughes, and sent them to three times as many stations, and pledged them their support on his own responsibility; the employment of four others speedily followed, and before the year closed ten besides himself were in the field, and all were paid in full. During the year he traveled over 20,000 miles establishing churches, encouraging education and confirming the moral sentiment of new communities. In 1870 he was commissioned by the Board of Domestic Missions Superintendent of Presbyterian Missions from Mexico to Canada and from Nevada to Nebraska. Interest in the East was awaking and the reunion of the Presbyterian bodies gave a new impulse to the work. Teachers and preachers were found to occupy the strategic points, like

him willing to make sacrifices and share hardships. Thrilling incidents from his experiences could be rehearsed as some awaking soul sought his counsel, found light and entered upon a new life, or as he was called to administer the consolations of the gospel to a dying miner or other settler, far from church privileges and from the tender ministrations of home. His own opportunities of home life were most limited. In 1870 his family moved to Denver, but he could be with them only occasionally unless they joined him for a few weeks or months, when he might take personal charge of some station for a limited time. They knew all the hardships of pioneer missionary life on small salary.

Journeying then he found far less comfort than is now enjoyed in the same region; railroad building advanced slowly, and he traveled as he could, by stage, often night and day, sleeping as his power to sleep and his shortness of stature enabled him to, curled up on the seat of a coach; or on horseback, perchance, as in his Minnesota and Wisconsin experiences from 1859 to 1869, overtaken by blinding snowstorms; or compelled to wade into the partly frozen streams and break the ice on the banks of the river before his horse could cross; or in a Mexican ox cart—in which one single journey, in March, 1877, occupied him ten days; or imperiled by losing

the trail on the prairie or mountain; or during the years from 1869 to 1880 crossing snow-faced avalanches where others perished just before or after his passing; or among the trackless mountains of Arizona, far from food or water; or shut in by prairie fires, which swept wildly around him, or fleeing before the roaring flames, leaping from pine to pine along the mountain side; or, perhaps, a long summer day with his rifle resting on his knee amid the dangers of the savage Sioux; or in passing the mountain summit at an altitude of 13,000 feet, in which both ascent and descent were beset with extremest perils—passing crags or steppes of ice or snow where a single misstep would have been death, or where below the tree line the floundering over falling timbers and the crossing of streams filled with ice rendered passage next to impossible. His narrow escapes are among the marvels of personal experience; five times the stage was robbed just before or after he passed over the route; once there was only the motion of a finger between him and death as a half dozen revolvers were pointed at him; once he escaped scalping by Apaches on the war path only by a few hours; again he goes unharmed when his steamer on the upper Missouri is fired into by hostile Indians; again from a fanatical papal mob threatening his life, and is once delivered from prison where he had been thrust for the

gospel's sake. How many of his strange passages might be described! Once in a most perilous lofty mountain passage, in 1887, exhaustion forced him to give up, heart throbbing, nose bleeding, eyes running and ears ringing, the trail lost and his feet so blistered that he could go no further, the settlement still ten miles away,—he and his companions were rescued through their discovery by a wandering miner.

A SUMMARY OF RESULTS.

Each of his several trips to Montana might take him 1,500 miles, or into Arizona, 2,000 miles. In the prosecution of this work he traveled during 13 years 345,027 miles, or an average of 26,540 miles a year. Amid these journeys all the nobler qualities of character and traits of mind were brought into requisition. He not only organized churches, he sent teachers to places and brought preachers into his service, advised with reference to church architecture and manifold other questions which persons and the communities brought to his attention. His correspondence was enormous. In March, 1872, he established and for ten years conducted the *Rocky Mountain Presbyterian*, a monthly illustrated paper devoted to the work under his care.

Overtaxed as he was with these manifold labors, his mind took in the conditions of the regions beyond, and in August, 1877, he visited Alaska as the first ordained missionary from the United States, and located a teacher, Mrs. A. R. McFarland, at Fort Wrangle. Neither the church nor the government had waked up to the obligations assumed under the treaty of purchase from Russia in 1867. Congress had not provided that the laws of the United States should be extended over its population. A revenue was collected from the fur seal islands and a monthly mail was carried to Fort Wrangel and Sitka. All else was left to the chances of the unregulated trade and enterprise of private citizens. The Commissioner of Education from 1870 had annually reported the absence of education and the imperative need of its supply for the natives and settlers. Dr. Jackson took in the entire situation. The natives, under the flag of the most enlightened Christian nation under the heavens, were perishing in the practice of the most degrading pagan customs and superstitions. He saw the part that the churce and the civil government must perform in their elevation, and applied himself with the greatest skill and assiduity to his task. His church, under his lead from 1877

to 1885, rapidly established schools and churches in the Southeast, and the natives responded with marked alacrity.

In 1877 he commenced an agitation to arouse public attention and secure Congressional legislation, but Congress took no action until Benjamin Harrison became Senator and member of the Committee on Territories, and through the influence of Dr. Jackson led in the enactment of a law giving a limited territorial government for benighted Alaska, including the establishment of schools. Dr. Jackson was appointed, in 1885, general agent for education under the Bureau of Education in the Interior Department. As far as the limited appropriation would permit, the most important localities for the establishment of schools were selected, regulations were provided, and Dr. Jackson, with his usual promptness, was on his way with supplies and teachers for the schools, and where required, with material for erecting the necessary building. Feeling the inadequacy of the government provision, he appealed to the Christian denominations—Presbyterians, Catholics, Baptists, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Methodists and Moravians, for assistance. At his instance a conference was held, in January, 1880, in New York City, and the region was divided between the churches so as to avoid any conflict of interest.

The efforts put forth by the government and by the churches have already yielded marvelous results. The acquisition of English by the natives has rendered them more helpful to explorers and in the development of the great industries of mining and fishing. Under the influence of Christian teaching many have given up the vices and crimes of paganism, become skilled in civilized industries, set themselves apart in separate families, fulfilling faithfully the obligations of father, mother and child. The work has been well begun, but a vast amount remains to be accomplished. In December, 1887, Dr. Jackson established the *North Star* newspaper, printed at Sitka, to advocate the interests of religious education and civilization in Alaska. He built the church and founded (1880) the Industrial Training School for Native Children at Sitka; appreciating the importance of preserving a knowledge of the history of the country, native population and their customs, he organized, August, 1887, at Sitka, the Alaskan Society of Natural history and Ethnology, and erected a building for the museum. The collection is already one of extreme value. The most northern school is at Point Barrow, established by himself in 1890.

The same year his attention was called to the fact that whole villages had perished for want of food on islands and points of the coast of Behring Sea and the Arctic Ocean. An examination led to the conclusion that in the use of improved firearms the natives had recklessly destroyed the animals on which they depended for food. Further observation convinced him that Siberians live under similar conditions and have ample food by cultivating the reindeer. His conclusion was sustained by the facts in the experience of the Laplanders. Dr. Jackson said: "The way to save the remainder of the population from starvation is to educate them to raise, train and use the reindeer." Appealing to the government in the winter of 1890-91, he met no response, but certain newspapers taking up the cause, collected a small sum of money. The Treasury, co-operating with the Bureau of Education, offered the revenue cutter *Bear* for transportation of the reindeer. Some declared the Siberians, on account of their superstition, would not sell reindeer, and that the deer could not be transported, but on trial the deer were easily purchased, safely transported, landed on an island, and as there was no money to pay for a herder, they were left to themselves for

the winter. In the spring they were found to have wintered well and increased in numbers; the experiment a success, in 1893-94, Congress began to make small appropriations.

In order to train the natives in herding, Dr. Jackson procured headers with their trained dogs from Lapland in the summer of 1894; thus, speedily, were the means sufficient, a question would be settled, not only to the education, but to the very existence of the natives. Alaska abounds in the food supply for deer, and the skin of the deer furnishes clothing, and its flesh food for the natives; and the trained deer is far superior to the dog for transportation in that part of Alaska covered with snow and ice.

Two of the missionaries in Alaska have been murdered, Charles H. Edwards, January 10, 1892, at Kake Village, by white whisky smugglers, and Harrison R. Thornton, August 19, 1893, by hoodlum Eskimo young men. It has been repeatedly reported, to the extreme anxiety of his family and friends, that Dr. Jackson had lost his life by violence or in storms or exposure, but so far he has escaped every peril of the sea, starving, and of the ice-bound sea or the trackless forest. Part of the year (from April to October) he is in Alaska, and a part he is at Washington, furnishing information and aiding the Commissioner of Education in adminis-

tering the schools. The enormous distances which he travels will be understood by the statement that his annual trip includes some 17,000 miles by land and water, now in the majestic steamer, then in the *Bear*, or the dory, or the great dug-out of the natives. Dr. Jackson's pungent statement of the facts connected with his work has been called for in many quarters, and few men have spoken to a greater number of audiences.

But the least indicative of the man is his gift of $50,000 to found a Christian college in Utah, about which many questions are asked. How came a home missionary to do this, who has endured such hardships and had so few opportunities to make money?

Of a most practical common-sense turn of mind, whatever hardships were required of him, he lived within his means, and improved opportunities for investing his small savings. His parents and his wife's parents left to their children a limited inheritance, and he finds that his family (according to their inexpensive way of living) possesses a moderate fortune. He does not spend that fortune in luxurious living, nor bestow it after he is dead, but gives it to found this college in Utah while he is alive, in accordance with a sense of duty—a Christian altruism which has pervaded his life.

In May, 1897, Dr. Jackson was elected Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, an honor which is but a just recognition of his long, heroic misssionary career.

1898

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It has been our good fortune more than once of late, to meet with our Presbyterial Society, and to be pleasantly surprised to find among its officers women who were officially connected as well, with the Board of our State Federation of Clubs. These women were doing vigorous, efficient work for the Church—no one could hear their reports, or note their earnestness, and doubt the fact.

Half of our Presbyterian women do not know how the "other half" work, and what great good they accomplish. This is a plea that those women who do not know should inform themselves, and then come with those already at work to the "help of the Lord against the mighty."

Fellow club women, do not let us dare to withhold from Christian work any help that we can give; and keeping our club work and meetings that we so much enjoy in their right position, subordinate, we may expect a double blessing—the blessing both of "him who gives and him who takes."

CORDELIA A. HALLOWAY.

Price, 1 cent each.